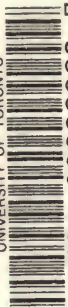




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Berkeleian philosophy

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BERKELEIAN PHILOSOPHY.

BY THE

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INCUMBENT OF ST ANDREW'S CHURCH,
AND CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF EDINBURGH.



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BERKELEIAN PHILOSOPHY,

*An Inaugural Essay by the Rev. Charles R. Teape, Incumbent
of St Andrew's Church, and Chaplain to the Bishop of
Edinburgh, for the attainment of the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy and Master of Arts at Göttingen.*



BERKELEIAN PHILOSOPHY.

IT cannot be thought otherwise than that the age a man lives in may be considered the flesh and bones of his being; and neither the philosophy or work of any one can be truly understood, till we investigate the nature of the individual, and the circumstances which surrounded him. We can then discover the first spark dropt into his mind—whence it was kindled, and the mode and nature of the ray as it shone out from him on the world. If this may be considered an axiom true of all men, it is specially true of Berkeley; and we can alone understand his philosophy by first looking at him and his age, and then considering him as a Teacher of New Philosophy—an opponent; and lastly, the application of his philosophy. The life of Berkeley exhibits a character pure, benevolent, self-sacrificing—the honors and emoluments of life were to him nothing in comparison with truth and duty.

When entering college, he found the seeds of metaphysical thought thickly sown there, and springing up in many curious questions about the world of sense. Newton's Philosophy was drawing scientific minds to optical experiment, and presenting phenomena which called for

solution. The Philosophy of Locke had just been introduced into his College, and sent men to the study of themselves and the language they spoke. Malebranche had found in vision some of his most startling illustrations of the inherent fallacy of the senses. Hooke, Boyle, and the Royal Society were beginning to treat all nature as a book, and science its interpreter. And particularly, above every other circumstance, the question of Molyneux made this young student specially think—Molyneux, “whom,” he says, “I am proud to call my friend,” and whose son was under his tuition. This question introduced into the second edition of Locke’s *Essay*, was,—“Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell when he felt the one and the other—which is the cube, and which the sphere? Suppose, then, the cube and the sphere placed on a table, and the blind man made to see: Query, Whether by his sight only, before he touched them, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe or which the cube?” “To this, Locke,” adds the acute and judicious proposer, “answers Not. For, though he had obtained his experience of how a globe—how a cube effects his touch—yet he has not obtained the experience, that what affects his touch so and so, must affect his sight so and so; or that a protuberant angle in the cube, that pressed his hand unequally, shall appear in the eye, as it does in the cube.” Add to this another work which Berkeley must often

have read, the “*Dioptrica Nova*” of Molyneux, in which we read words almost identical with those of Berkeley. “For distance itself is not to be perceived; for ’tis a line (or a length) presented to our eye with its end towards us, which must, therefore, be only a point, and that is invisible; wherefore, distance is chiefly perceived by means of interjacent bodies.” Here is presented the great problem Berkeley set himself to solve, and which issued in the publication of his “*New Theory of Vision*.” When we compare this work as first published in 1709, with the “*Vindication*,” twenty-four years after, in 1733, we see the manner in which this original question forms the nucleus and source of all his philosophy. The “*Theory of Vision*” can alone be understood when taken in connection with his other writings; and his philosophy can alone be truly known, when seen germinating from the question of Molyneux. In the original essay of 1709, the vulgar assumption of objects common to sight and touch is cautiously dissolved by analysis; and the counter theory of a relation between what we see and what we touch,—analagous to that between words and what they signify,—is substituted in its place. In this long period, the philosophical mind of Berkeley was assuming a definite form; the first enunciation in the essay on the “*Theory of Vision*,” the climax and full developement in the “*Vindication*,” in which he starts with what is his conclusion in the essay,—that what we see is the alphabet of a language which the Governor of nature is constantly

addressing to us for the prudent regulation of our actions in this world of sense; and, as a scientific vindication of this conclusion, he deduces solutions of various phenomena, explaining with great ingenuity difficulties connected with visible things. All the writings of Berkeley must be taken in, to give a fair outline of his philosophy, and see the forming of his own principles during a period of more than five-and-twenty years. In 1710 and 1713, in the "Principles of Human Knowledge," and in his "Dialogues," he employed the reasoning of the "Essay" against abstract extension, and on behalf of the absolute heterogeneity of the two sensible extensions of sight and touch, against an abstract world of matter in all its phases. Nearly twenty years later, in "Alciphron," he argued that the theory of visual language involves a new and unanswerable proof of the existence and immediate operation of God, and the constant care of His providence.

To ascertain, therefore, what the New Philosophy of Berkeley is, it may be best to take "the Principles of Human Knowledge" as the ground-work, referring to his other works occasionally, when necessary to elucidate his views.

I.—The first part of the "Principles of Human Knowledge" state his own exposition, from sections 1 to 33. To epitomise which, we may say, that he denies the existence of matter in the commonly-received philosophical acceptance,—an unperceiving, unthinking substratum,

the inoperative substance and cause of what we see—a stupid thoughtlessness somewhat, interposing between God and man.

He affirms that substance, properly so called, is mind and spirit, which form the true self or *ego*; that cause is equivalent to will, and substance proper to *ego*. “I” is the same as “soul or spiritual substance,”—that which perceives ideas, and wills and reasons about them, an active perceiving agent—a spirit wholly different from an “idea,” which is passive.

Therefore he affirms matter, in his own view, to be ideas and objects of sense, which, when grouped together, make up material substances, and, when regarded as invariable, are the laws of nature.

The question which involves the whole philosophy of Berkeley, and on which it turns is,—are what we see and touch necessarily united to an *unknown and inconceivable substance*, or are they freely united by the divine will and according to the divine ideas? Is mind, or is it not, immediately speaking to our eyes, hands, and ears, whenever we use them? It is more reasonable, in Berkeley’s view, to suppose that the union is the immediate expression of supreme mind in analogy with our own, than to refer it to “material substance,”—a mere name into which we can throw no conception at all. We can conceive other minds, and we know what it is to be spoken to by another person; but we have neither experience nor conception of insensible material objects, which exist when

they are not known, and which identify what in consciousness is heterogeneous. In the constant relation between sight and feeling, we have phenomena similar to what we experience when another is speaking to us. These phenomena accordingly afford us the same proof that the whole world of visible sense is grounded in mind, and as it were personated, which we have that the audible or visible words or actions of our fellow-men are so. This is well brought out in the fourth dialogue. "Nothing," says Alciphron (who personates the Atheist), "so much convinces me of the existence of *another person* as his talking to me. . . . And this is a peculiar argument inapplicable to your purpose; for you will not, I suppose, pretend that God speaks to man in the same clear and sensible manner as one man doth to another. . . . *Euph.* This is really and in truth my opinion. . . . *Crito.* The instantaneous production and reproduction of so many signs combined, dissolved, transposed, diversified, and adapted to such endless variety of purposes, ever shifting with the occasions suited to them, doth set forth and testify the immediate operation of a spirit or thinking being. . . . This visual language proves not a Creator merely, but a provident governor, actually and intimately present and attentive to all our interests and motions. . . . Informing, admonishing, and directing incessantly, in a most evident and sensible manner."

This being a summary of Berkeley's view, we will enter more fully on it, as explained by him in his "Principles of

Human Knowledge." He defines the objects of human knowledge to be—

1. Either ideas actually imprinted on the senses.
2. Or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions or operations of the mind.
3. Or lastly, ideas formed by help of memory and imagination, either in compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways.

But we are conscious of a variety of ideas; we perceive a continual succession of ideas or objects of knowledge, some new—others changed—others totally disappear. There is, therefore, some cause of these ideas on which they depend, and by which they are produced. This cause is not any quality or idea; for all our ideas, sensations, or things we perceive, are visibly *inactive*—no ideas or object of thought can make any alteration in another. Therefore it must be a substance, not an unthinking corporeal substance, but an incorporeal active substance or *spirit*, one simple, undivided, active being, perceiving everything, but itself incapable of being perceived. This Berkeley calls *mind*, *spirit*, *soul*, or *myself*, by which he does not mean an idea, but that in which ideas exist, and whereby they are perceived; for the existence of an idea consists in being perceived,—it is *inert*, fleeting, dependent. As this *fundamental spirit* perceives ideas, it is called *understanding*; as it produces, or otherwise operates on them, it is called *will*. The *will* creates a number of thoughts, many of

them purely *imaginary*. These are the proofs of its activity and existence.

There is another class of ideas, not dependent on my will,—as when in daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose what I shall perceive, or what objects of sound or sense shall present themselves. There is, therefore, *another will or spirit* that produces them, or excites them in our minds,—a spirit infinitely wise, good, and powerful, proved to be so by his regularity and influence,—*Laws of Nature*, learned by us through *experience*, which teach us that such and such ideas are attended with such and such ideas in the ordinary course of things.

Inward feeling or reflection gives us the knowledge of our own existence.

Reason gives the knowledge of other spirits.

By an *immediate knowledge*, I am aware of my own mind and my own ideas; and, by the help of these, do *mediately* apprehend the possibility of the existence of other spirits and ideas. Farther, from my own being, and from the dependency I find in myself and my ideas, I do, by an *act of reason*, necessarily infer the existence of a God, and of all created things in the mind of God. The soul of man is neither an idea nor like an idea; for ideas are things inactive and perceived, whereas spirits are active and perceiving. Yet, taking the word in a large sense, my soul may be said to furnish me with an idea, that is, an image or likeness of God, though indeed extremely inadequate. The *soul* is indivisible, incorporeal, unex-

tended, and, consequently, incorruptible. Nothing can be plainer than that the motions, changes, decays, and dissolutions which we hourly see befall natural bodies, (and which is what we mean by the *course of nature*), cannot possibly affect an active, simple, uncompounded substance. Such a being is, therefore, indissoluble by the force of nature,—that is to say, *the soul of man is naturally immortal*. All the notion I have of God, is obtained by reflecting on my own soul, heightening its powers, and removing its imperfections. I have, therefore, though an inactive idea, yet in myself some sort of an active thinking image of the Deity. And, though I perceive Him not by sense, yet I have a notion of Him, or know Him by reflection and reasoning.

It is thus Berkeley resolves all power and reality into *Spirit*: the infinite Spirit of God, “upholding all things by the word of His power,” maintaining intercourse between spirits, whereby they are able to perceive the existence of each other. And yet this pure, clear light, which enlightens every one, is itself invisible; and the spirit of man, in and by which all things are perceived, which possesses powers that give rise to responsibility and freedom, and when erring to evil and to sin. When he has thus seated God on His rightful throne,—the Origin of all things,—the Sustainer and Contriver of all, by whose word and wisdom they were created, and by the same sustained,—then he affirms that an infinite mind should be necessarily inferred from the bare exist-

ence of the sensible world, because the sensible world is that which we perceive by our several senses; but nothing is perceived by the senses but ideas, and no idea, or archetype of an idea, can exist otherwise than in a mind. The human mind, by an act of will, forms a great variety of ideas, and raises them up in the imagination; but these are not so distinct, strong, vivid, or permanent as those perceived by the senses which are called *real things*; and being not the creation, or under the command, of our own mind, prove the operation of a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I perceive. And from the order, variety, and manner of these, —a variety dependent wholly on the will of the *Governing Spirit*, who causes certain bodies to cleave together, and others to fly asunder, just as He sees convenient, the law of their nature, as well as existence, depending on the will of the Creator,—I conclude, hence, the Author of all these things to be *wise*, powerful, and good beyond comparison. The things perceived by me are known by the understanding, and produced by the will of an Infinite Spirit.

The rudest mass proves His existence, the soul of man is His reflected image, and the order of the universe the evidence of His wisdom, goodness, and power. This is Berkeley's threefold demonstration for the being of God. All things hang on Deity—their existence is lodged in Him. He does as He wills in the armies of heaven and among the children of men; all things have a necessary and immediate dependence upon Him.

The state of things are therefore twofold—the one ectypal or natural, the other archetypal or eternal; the former created in time, the latter existing from everlasting in the mind of God. Many of the former were said to be created relatively to us, though their existence might have been previous, and they answering other designs; yet, beginning their existence, as far as we are concerned, at the moment when God decreed they should *become perceptible* to intelligent creatures in that order and manner which He then established, and we now call *the laws of nature*. It is in this light Berkeley understands much of the Mosaic account of the creation of the world,—a view which certainly clears away a great part of geological difficulty.

But while all things exist BY God, they do not exist so as to be seen IN God. The Deity—spiritual in nature, omnipresent, all mighty, all sustaining, omniscient—remains one, undivided and distinct, in his own essence; while everything in creation exists because beheld by His mind, sustained by His power, and ordered by His wisdom. I see compactness and a number of other qualities. I call what I see a rock; but it would not possess one of these qualities did not God see the same rock and give it every one of the qualities I perceive; and should it be banished from His inspecting mind and sustaining power, not one of these qualities would for one moment longer remain. The same with the flower in the garden, the apple and cherry in the orchard, the scenery above and

around me, the glove on my hand. All equally derive the qualities I behold from the mind and power of God. Spirit is the efficient and active cause of our ideas, impressing us immediately; and from what we see, we can read the presence and attributes of Him that made them. Creation is no less true and real in the Berkeleian Philosophy than in our ordinary ideas. Berkeley denies he is a setter-up of *new notions*. He says his endeavour is to unite and place in a clearer light that truth which was before shared between the vulgar and the philosophers; the former being of opinion that *those things they immediately perceive are the real things*; and the latter, that the things *immediately* perceived are ideas which exist only in the mind. Which two notions put together do in effect constitute the substance of what I advance."

Nature, in his view, is not so much the temple of Deity as that by which He acts *immediately, really, and effectively* on us. He imputes to God what heathen philosophers used to impute to Nature. The entire Scripture seems vocal to his touch, and he quotes Jeremiah, Amos, and David as expressing his philosophy, when they say, "He causeth the vapours to ascend; He maketh lightning with rain; He bringeth forth the wind out of His treasures."—"He turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night." "He visiteth the earth, and maketh it soft with showers: He blesseth the springing thereof, and crowneth the year with His goodness; so that the pastures are clothed with flocks, and

the valleys are covered with corn." And then he adds, notwithstanding that this is the constant language of Scripture, yet we have I know not what aversion from believing that God concerns Himself so nearly in our affairs. Fain would we suppose Him at a great distance, and substitute some blind unthinking deputy in His stead, though (if we may believe St Paul)—"He be not far from every one of us." But we cannot refrain,—perhaps at the expense of being thought tedious,—from quoting one passage, which seems the most sublime Berkeley ever uttered, showing his intense admiration of Nature, and his delight in being led from Nature to Nature's God, and seeing in a presiding spirit the only reality in the universe. "Look! are not the fields covered with a delightful verdure? Is there not something in the woods and groves, in the rivers and clear springs, that soothes, that delights, that transports the soul? At the prospect of the wide and deep ocean, or some huge mountain whose top is lost in the clouds, or of an old gloomy forest, are not our minds filled with a gloomy horror? Even in rocks and deserts, is there not an agreeable wilderness? How sincere a pleasure is it to behold the natural beauties of the earth; to preserve and renew our relish for them! Is not the veil of night alternately drawn over our face, and doth she not change her dress with the seasons? How aptly are the elements disposed! What variety and use in the meanest productions of Nature! What delicacy, what beauty, what con-

trivance, in animal and vegetable bodies! How exquisitely are all things suited, as well to their particular ends, as to constitute opposite parts of the whole! And while they mutually aid and support, do they not also set off and illustrate each other? Raise now your thoughts from this vale of earth to all those glorious luminaries that adorn the high arch of heaven. The motion and situation of the planets, are they not admirable for use and order? Were those (miscalled *erratic*) globes ever known to stray in their repeated journeyings through the pathless void? Do they not measure areas round the sun ever proportioned to their times? So fixed, so immutable, are the laws by which the *unseen Author of Nature actuates* the universe. How vivid and radiant is the lustre of the fixed stars! How magnificent and rich that negligent profusion with which they appear to be scattered throughout the whole azure vault? Yet, if you take the telescope, it brings into your sight a new host of stars that escape the naked eye. Here they seem continuous and minute, but, to a nearer view, immense orbs of light, at various distances, far sunk in the abyss of space. Now, you must call imagination to your aid. The feeble narrow sense cannot descry innumerable worlds revolving round the central fires, and in those worlds *the energy of an all-perfect mind displayed in endless forms*. But neither sense nor imagination are big enough to comprehend the boundless extent, with all its glittering furniture. Though the labouring mind exert and strain

each power to its utmost reach, there stands out ungrasped a surplusage immeasurable. Yet all the vast bodies that compass this mighty frame, how distant remote soever, are, by some sacred mechanism, some Divine art and force, linked in a mutual dependence and intercourse with each other, even with this earth, which was almost slipt out of my thoughts, and lost in the crowd of worlds. Is not the whole system immense, beautiful, glorious beyond expression and beyond thought! What treatment then do those philosophers deserve, who would deprive those noble and delightful scenes of all reality?"

This is the scene on which Berkeley looks,—God the only real efficient Being in it, and working on man by sensible things, immediate ideas, which, by viewing, reflecting, combining, add to his store of knowledge regarding himself and Him who upholds them.

But other scenes await man's view—those which indicate *evil, blemish, defect, profusion, pain*. To this Berkeley answers, What we call blemish, may be only a sort of variety to augment the beauty of creation, as shades in a picture set off its brighter and more enlightened parts.

Again, what we call *profusion* may be merely the riches of that Omnipotent Spirit, who produces everything by a mere fiat and act of His will. And *evil* has the nature of good, when considered as linked with the whole system of things.

II.—Having so far ascertained what Berkeley's Philosophy is, we are prepared to enter on the objections raised against it—in discussing which, more light will be thrown on the philosophy itself. Berkeley's defence may be considered in a threefold manner. *First*, Those objections which he himself supposes, and which he states and refutes: *Secondly*, A comparison of his views with some contemporaries, to whom he appears allied or opposed: and *Thirdly*, The result of his philosophy taken up and applied by the acute penetrating mind of Hume, as the negation of all belief.

The supposed objections by Berkeley need not be fully stated, since they appear clearly embodied in his work, each with a refutation. They are in number thirteen, extending from sections 34 to 85 inclusive. It may be objected that, through this philosophy, all that is real and substantial in nature is banished, and chimerical ideas put in its stead; all corporeal substance is removed; no difference between perception and imagination; the ideas of sight and touch confused; things every moment annihilated and created anew. If extension and figure are only in the mind, it follows that the mind is extended and figured; all that has been explained or achieved on the supposition of matter falls to the ground. Is it not absurd to take away natural cause, and place the immediate operation of spirit in its stead? The universal consent of all mankind is in favour of matter, which is not likely to deceive or be deceived; the relations of sameness

in cause and effect—this new philosophy is inconsistent with several sound truths in philosophy and mathematics; it sets aside the use of order, design, and beauty in the universe. And may not God use inert, senseless substance to excite ideas in us; or, if a new sense was given, might not that substance be discovered, which our present senses cannot perceive? But, lastly, the new philosophy is opposed to the teaching and language of revelation, and overthrows the idea of miracles.

To these supposed objections, Berkeley makes suitable replies:—Affirming that objections do not invalidate truth, being only a call for more careful enquiry; nor even the apparent contradiction of the universal consent of all mankind, for his philosophy no more alters philosophical belief, than the present astronomical discoveries those which they have supplanted. As to distance, that is the result of knowledge derived from other sources than vision, light and colour alone being acknowledged the proper object of sight. And again, any objections raised against the new philosophy, are fewer and less important than those which are and can be brought forward against any other philosophy. And as to the reality of things, they are far more real when taken in accordance with his views; for, instead of being the fortuitous chance or union of accidents, they are the direct actings of supreme mind, uniting that which has no union in itself beyond the will of omnipotence—dissevering, impressing, and connecting, just as He wills and acts. As to the results of philosophy

or mechanics, these are uninjured, having generally to do with figure, motion, and other qualities which are in truth nothing more than mere ideas, and what can be rightly deduced from these is to be believed. However, it must be remembered, that the connection of ideas does not imply the relation of cause and effect, but only the mark or sign with the things signified. And, lastly, as to the common language of mankind, whether in writings, words, or revelation, this never implies the philosophical view of matter, but the Berkeleian; never a something distinct from, under, and giving existence, but merely what we see, hear, feel, &c., and which appeals to our sensible faculties. Consequently, universal consent and Scripture are on Berkeley's side; and, instead of a senseless, unthinking, inactive substratum of philosophy, which causes all things, Berkeley substitutes a wise, active, intelligent, mind or spirit—what is regular, perfect, orderly, and beautiful in its design and contrivance; proving the existence of a governing, perfect, good, and sovereign will. What is imperfect, irregular, or limited, denoting the influence of a finite, less regular, and less powerful mind, to which belong the actings and influence that are human and finite. Having glanced at the objections Berkeley thought likely to present themselves, we come to view him contrasted either with other philosophers, previous or contemporary. He clearly mentions the names of his opponents, Atheists, Sceptics, Epicureans, Hobists, and Spinoza; and more than fourteen times speaks against Locke,

enveighs against his doctrine of *Abstraction*, and *Primary Ideas*, both in "the *Principles of Human Knowledge*, and in his *three Dialogues*, and draws a distinction between himself and Malibranche. Beside these, he accuses the prevailing thought in his day, as a tendency to idolatry, a denial of the Resurrection, and a removing God from His own universe.

All which errors he considers his own philosophy as directly instrumental in removing. It would occupy much space unnecessarily to quote all the passages in his writings bearing on these several points. A few, chosen from any part, speak clearly enough:—

Regarding *Abstraction*, he says, in the Introduction to the "*Principles of Human Knowledge*," sec. x.:—

"I own myself able to abstract in one sense, as when I consider some particular parts or qualities separated from others, with which, though they are united in some object, yet it is possible they may really exist without them. But I *deny that I can abstract one from another*, or conceive separately those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated; or that I can frame a *general notion by abstracting* from particulars in the manner aforesaid, which two last are the proper acceptations of *Abstraction*."

Regarding *Primary and Secondary Qualities*, he says, "*Principles of Human Knowledge*," sec. ix.:—"Some there are who make a distinction betwixt *primary* and *secondary* qualities: by the *former*, they mean extension,

figure, motion, rest, solidity, or impenetrability, and number; by the *latter*, they denote all other sensible qualities, as colours, sounds, tastes, and so forth. The ideas we have of these they acknowledge not to be the resemblances of anything existing without the mind, or unperceived; but they will have our ideas of the *primary* qualities to be *patterns* or *images* of those which exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance which they call *matter*. By matter, therefore, we are to understand an inert, senseless substance, in which extension, figure, and motion do actually subsist. But it is evident, from what we have already shewn, that extension, figure, and motion are only ideas existing in the mind, and that an idea can be like nothing but another idea, and that consequently neither they nor their archetypes can exist in an unperceiving substance. Hence it is plain that the very notion of what is *called matter*, or *corporeal substance*, involves a contradiction in it." "They who assert that figure, motion, and the rest of the primary or original qualities, do exist without the mind in unthinking substances, do at the same time acknowledge that colours, sounds, heat, cold, and such like secondary qualities do not—which, they tell us, are sensations existing in the mind alone, that depend on, and are occasioned by, the different size, texture, and motion of the minute particles of matter. This they take to be an undoubted truth, which they can demonstrate beyond all exception. Now, if it be certain that those original

qualities are inseparably united with the other sensible qualities, and not, even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them, it plainly follows that they exist only in the mind. But I desire any one to reflect, and try whether he can, by an abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body without all other sensible qualities. For my part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moved; but I must withal give it some colour, or other sensible quality, which is acknowledged to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where, therefore, the other sensible qualities are, there must these be also—to wit, in the mind, and nowhere else.” In the same line of argument he enumerates other qualities.

Another theory he combats, is “the opinion that everything includes within itself the cause of its properties; or that there is in each object an inward essence which is the source whence its discernible qualities flow, and whereon they depend.” These occult qualities, often resolved into mechanical causes, he illustrates and refutes by the case of *gravitation*. His greatest opposition is towards *matter*, as being to his mind the source of all error. He says, “the doctrine of matter, or corporeal substance, has been the main pillar and support of scepticism, and upon the same foundation have been raised all the impious schemes of Atheism and irreligion; on the same principle

doth idolatry likewise in all its various forms depend." But the errors which he desired to oppose cannot be better summed up than in his own words in "The Second Dialogue,"—"You may now, without any laborious search into the sciences, without any subtlety of reason or tedious length of discourse, oppose and baffle the most strenuous advocate for Atheism; those miserable refuges, whether in an eternal succession of unthinking causes and effects, or in a fortuitous concourse of atoms; whose wild imaginations of Vanini, Hobbes, and Spinoza; in a word, the whole system of Atheism, is it not entirely overthrown by this single reflection on the repugnancy included in supposing the whole or any part, even the most rude and shapeless of the visible world, to *exist without a mind?*" It was from these errors his soul recoiled, and he gloried in the noble achievement of having discovered a Philosophy which cut the ground from under all these theories and restored things to their true position.

Berkeley seems, however, to have felt that there was a danger of confounding his views with those of Malebranche, and in giving his views of and difference from Malebranche he gives a pretty clear account of what he himself holds. "I shall not therefore be surprised, if some men imagine, that I run into the enthusiasm of Malebranche, though, in truth, I am very remote from it. He builds on the most abstract general ideas, which I entirely disclaim. He asserts an absolute external world, which I deny. He maintains we are deceived by our senses, and know not

the real natures or the true forms and figures of extended beings; of all which I hold the direct contrary; so that, upon the whole, there are no principles more fundamentally opposite than his and mine. It must be owned that I entirely agree with what the holy Scripture saith, 'that in God we live and move and have our being.' But that we see things in His essence, after the manner above set forth, I am far from believing. Take *here in brief my meaning*. It is evident that the things I perceive, are my own ideas; and that no idea can exist unless it be in a mind. Nor is it less plain that these ideas, or things by me perceived, either themselves or their archetypes, exist independently of my mind, since I know myself not to be their author, it being out of my power to determine at pleasure what particular ideas I shall be affected with, upon opening my eyes or ears. They must, therefore, exist in some other mind, whose will it is they should be exhibited to me. The things, I say, immediately perceived, are ideas or sensations, call them which you will. But how can any idea or sensation exist in, or be produced by, anything but a mind or spirit? This is indeed inconceivable; and, to assert that which is inconceivable, is to talk nonsense."

This gives a fair specimen of Berkeley's theory and mode of treating his opponents. But, before leaving this important part of the subject, we will obtain a clearer view of Berkeleianism, by comparing it with a few more of his contemporaries; not only Locke, Spinoza, and Des

Cartes, but more especially with Leibnitz and Malebranche, whom he most closely resembled, and all whose writings exercised great power in his day. The Metaphysical Philosophy of Leibnitz may be regarded as a reconstruction of Cartesianism on a broader basis, and with important modifications suggested by the consequences into which the Cartesian system had been resolved by Malebranche and Spinoza. The systems of Locke and Leibnitz are, in truth, re-actions, in opposite directions, against the earlier philosophy as involving these consequences. Cartesianism, which places the essence of matter in extension, and of mind in thought, tends to eliminate altogether finite causes and substances. Malebranche, accordingly, rejected *secondary* causes, and virtually resolved all the changes in the universe into the agency of God. Spinoza, advancing farther, deduced all finite existence from the One Absolute Substance. The Metaphysics of Leibnitz is fundamentally a theory of the essential activity of the substances or monads of existence, which possess, according to him, a power of spontaneous developement. In these unextended forces or monads, we obtain, says Leibnitz, the *a priori* idea of substance. Their individuality consists in the series of changes through which each passes. These changes are termed perceptions. Some perceptions are unconscious; and, among these, are the elements of which the material world is the issue. There are also the self-conscious souls of men, containing in themselves the seeds of necessary truth,

developing through experience. Creation implies the existence of the *monas monadum*, or supreme substance; whence all that is finite has been derived, and in which it all finds its explanation. The universe is thus a vast collection of unextended spiritual forces, which evolve themselves into a pre-established harmony or cosmical order, and which, in its final issues, constitutes a scheme of optimism. The created universe is a harmonious theocracy which expresses the attributes of the one Perfect Being. From His eternal throne, its several streams of elementary existence have taken their rise. They have flowed, and they must continue to flow, in the courses into which He sent them in the beginning; and, notwithstanding the dark shades in which many of them are enveloped, they are recognised by Omniscience as the only possible, and therefore the most glorious, illustration by creation of the pure fountain in which they originated. The speculations, therefore, of Leibnitz, one of the most illustrious thinkers, like those of Berkeley, though by a different route, thus conduct to immaterialism. His “demonstrative metaphysics” parts from body and extension before it resolves nature into its elements. The experimental philosophy of Berkeley fails to find, in the phenomena of perception, evidence of the existence of an extended substance, independent of the conscious Spirit that perceives them. Both have contributed to break up the crude popular notion of the material world, in which so much error has originated.

This short survey lets us pause to discover one flaw in the mind of Berkeley. He evidently was enthusiastic,—one idea held him,—the stone that turned all that touched it into gold. Just as in his writings on the cure of *tar water*, he seemed the restorer of human function and the curer of human infirmity; so his philosophical discovery seemed the cure of all philosophical and mental error. The man who could say of Malebranche, with whom he possessed so much in common, “there are no principles more fundamentally opposite than his and mine,” must have been an enthusiastic man; and we are not surprised at the sad and tragical end which resulted from their conversation when they met. Therefore, we are prepared to expect that, when Berkeley enters on his peculiar philosophy, he will look on it as entirely his own, and press it on with such vehemence and enthusiasm as to flood its banks, and drift onward to the verge of still more dangerous errors than he hoped to cure.

And this is exactly what has taken place. His name is generally connected with Immaterialism, and he has given ample ground that it should be so. His pious, upright, single mind, recoiled with a holy indignation from the iniquity of man, who “retains so great a fondness, against all the evidence of reason, for a stupid, thoughtless *somewhat*, by the interposition whereof it would, as it were, screen itself from the providence of God, and remove Him farther off from the affairs of the world.” If he succeeded in destroying this somewhat, and showing

how untenable and nonsensical it was, he hoped to restore man to the harmony of his own nature, and to God.

Consequently, we find him repeatedly speaking against *matter*. Yes, even denying its existence. This he does frequently,—“Principles of Human Knowledge,” sec. 133,—“If withal the removal of this *matter* be not attended with the least evil consequences,—if it be not even missed in the world, but everything as well, nay much easier conceived *without it*?” And in the Second Dialogue he says :—“How many shapes is your *matter* to take? Or how often must it be proved *not to exist*, before you are content to part with it?” And farther on, in the same Dialogue, he gives an ingenious summary,—“Pray, tell me, if the case stands not thus : at first, from the belief of a material substance, you would have it that the immediate objects existed without the mind ; then that their archetypes ; then causes ; next instruments ; then occasions ; lastly, *something in general*, which, being interpreted, proves *nothing*. So matter comes to nothing. What think you, Hylas, is not this a fair summary of your whole proceeding?” Matter, elsewhere, he calls a “material substratum.” And, at the close of the Third Dialogue, he again speaks more positively,—“But, for the *existence* of *matter* there is not one proof, and far more numerous and insurmountable objections lie against it.”

These few, out of many, give ample ground for the assertion that Berkeley disbelieved the existence of matter,—he required to speak strongly to dislodge an

enemy which held such ancient sway. Plato, Aristotle, their successors and predecessors, believed the existence of matter. To deny it, would seem as mad as it would be irrational and unphilosophical; yet, on doing away with it, Berkeley set his heart. He required, therefore, to discuss keenly and speak vehemently; but he has no less clearly proved the meaning he attaches to matter. The matter he glories in, is that which we know not of by any power of perception—an abstract unperceived thing; that which has no energy, life, perceptive, or active powers of its own; that which exists almost, if not entirely, from eternity,—and thus a rival of God, if not actually God, adored and worshipped by humanity; this unthinking, sluggish thing, exercising control over humanity, and taking the place of God, forming the material substratum independent of us, independent of Deity, the substratum of all we see, feel, and enjoy.

How mankind first came to think such a thing existed he mentions. “First it was thought that colour, figure, motion, and the rest of the sensible qualities, or accidents, did really exist without the mind; and, for this reason, it seemed needful to suppose some *unthinking substratum* or *substance* wherein they did exist, since they could not be conceived to exist by themselves. Afterwards, in process of time, men being convinced that colours, sounds, and the rest of the sensible secondary qualities, had no existence without the mind, they stripped this substratum or material substance of those qualities, leaving only the

primary ones,—figure, motion, and such like,—which they still conceive to exist without the mind, and consequently to stand in need of a material support. This is Berkeley's views of the origin of the existence of an "inert senseless matter,"—an unthinking substratum "of qualities and accidents,"—a "stupid thoughtless *somewhat*," "existing without the mind;" "a senseless unperceived substance. He recoils from the idea of such a thing producing ideas in man—or, what is still more terrible, in the mind of God, directing him how to produce sensations in our minds in a constant and regular method." We need not multiply quotations to prove the kind of matter Berkeley denies, as being the source of every evil and error. It is matter in a philosophical view he combats; one sentence of his proves this,—“Whereas philosophers vulgarly hold that the sensible qualities exist in an inert, extended, unperceiving substance, which they call matter, to which they attribute a natural subsistence, exterior to ALL thinking beings, or distinct from being perceived by ANY *mind* whatsoever, even the eternal mind of the Creator, wherein they suppose only ideas of the corporeal substances created by him; if indeed they allow them to be at all created,” for “the most celebrated among the ancient philosophers, even those who maintained the being of a God, have *thought* matter to be uncreated and co-eternal with him.” Existence, in the Berkeleian view, being synonymous with perception, in the hands of the acute and gifted Hume, this view is brought to its height of feebleness and desola-

tion. "Do you" he says, in his famous dilemma, "follow the instinct and propensities of nature in assenting to the veracity of sense? But these lead you to believe that the *very perception or sensible image is the external object.*" "Do you *disclaim this principle* in order to embrace a more rational opinion, that the perceptions are *only representations* of something external? You here depart from your natural propensities and more obvious sentiments, and yet are not able to satisfy your reason, which never can find any convincing argument from experience to prove that the perceptions are connected with any external objects." Speculation and practice, nature and philosophy, sense and reason, belief and knowledge, thus placed in mutual antithesis, give as their result, the uncertainty of every principle, and the avowal of complete scepticism.

It is in this human aspect of the question Berkeley has not sufficiently guarded himself, and laid himself and his philosophy open to attack and error. He clearly holds that matter has no existence independently of mind. While Hume follows out his second horn of dilemma, supposing the first impregnable, Berkeley throws himself on the first, and is uninjured. He lays aside all philosophical distinction between an external world *in itself* and *relatively to us*, between perception or sensible image and the thing perceived. With him the perception and object are one and inseparable, and had he brought out this point more clearly, it would have been an advantage. But this leads to a careful examination of the nature of our mental

process, what is consciousness, perception, and memory? And the point at issue must be argued in the view taken of these faculties. It is unnecessary to state the different opinions and their authors: we come to the question, What is *consciousness*? It is impossible to discriminate it from all the other faculties, or to discriminate any one of them from consciousness. It is impossible to describe it, because it is the origin of our intelligence, the *νοῦς* in man, the fountain of all we can either illustrate or comprehend, and therefore can itself be neither illustrated nor comprehended. Consciousness is a universal condition of intelligence existing in man, and constituting the elements of knowledge. When we consult it regarding the external world, it declares our knowledge of material qualities to be intuitive, existences different from self, which we only know of as existing, because we are conscious of them. The perception, consciousness, and external existence, however divided, are in reality one. I believe a material world exists, and that the external reality itself is the object of which I am conscious in perception. If this view is taken, we have gained one step in understanding Berkeley; but if it is denied or viewed differently, then the variety of opposing and conflicting elements of opinion come in.

We next enquire what is *memory*,—is it something acting in and on the past? It is not; nor is it an *immediate knowledge* of the past. This is a contradiction in terms, which is manifest whether we look from the act to the

object, or from the object to the act. To be known *immediately*, an object must be known in *itself*; to be known in itself, it must be known as actual, now existent, *present*. But the object of memory is *past*,—not present, not now existent, not actual; it cannot therefore be known in itself. If known at all, it must be known in something different from itself,—that is, *mediately*; and memory, as an immediate knowledge of *the past*, is thus impossible. Again, memory is an act of knowledge. An act exists only as present; and a present knowledge can be immediately cognisant only of a present object. But the object known in memory is *past*; consequently, either memory is not an *act* of knowledge at all, or the object immediately known is present; and the past of known is known only through the medium of the present. On either alternative, memory is not what Reid defines an “immediate knowledge of the past.” Memory, therefore, like our other faculties, affords only an immediate knowledge of the present, and, like them, is nothing more than consciousness variously modified. This is the nature of mental process; and those who hold this view must see the correctness of Berkeley’s philosophy. Instead of being surrounded by the unreal, we have the real, and the idea or impression is inseparable from the producing cause.

Existence, *absolutely and in itself*, no matter how much spoken of by philosophers,—and made to hold important relations to our mental process,—is a term we have no

faculties either to comprehend or discover. We deceive ourselves with words devoid of sense, meaning, or reality. Nothing *is*, and nothing is *known* to us, except those phases of being which stand in analogy to our faculties of knowledge. These we call *qualities*. When we say, therefore, that a thing is *known in itself*, we mean only that it stands face to face, in direct immediate relation to the conscious mind; in other words that, *as existing*, it forms part of the circle of our knowledge,—exists *since* it is known, and is known because it exists. In this the philosopher and the most unlearned are one, and hence Berkeley claims the unlearned as sharers in, and witnesses of, the truth of his opinions. We are then brought to the great difficulty and objection which may be raised,—If matter has no existence independent of mind, what becomes of matter supposing I were annihilated? Would the sky shine less brightly, the rivers flow less smoothly, the thunder cease to roll, and the beautiful spreadings of creation cease to exist, because my eye did not view them? This question cannot be fairly put, because we are incapable of conceiving it, and hence incapable of answering it. We have no faculty by which to conceive or understand the meaning or nature of *annihilation*.

Let us try if we can take the term in the affirmative. Imagine all percipient beings removed from the universe, and we say the rain would fall, the flowers blossom, the grass grow, and all creation wear its wonted aspect.

While speaking thus, what are we doing perfectly unconsciously,—are we not calling up all the associations of perception? We spoke of annihilating ourselves, and we have not done so; we make ourselves percipient spectators. We professed to keep ourselves ideally excluded from the scene, and to consider what it would be in the event of that exclusion, but we are not able to conceive one thought in that supposed annihilation. In thinking of the rain as it falls, the thunder as it rolls, and the rivers as they flow, and the sun flooding its light and loveliness, we have brought back to the scene, with all the powers and faculties of perception, the very percipient being whom we supposed,—erroneously supposed,—we had abstracted from creation. For what is that light or beauty, rain or thunder, we speak of, but existences, unknown and unthought of; inconceivable without man's eye to see them or his ear to hear them.

But take the negative view, and conceive one vast blank—a desert, every leaf removed, and all light and gladness gone, one expanse of nothingness. Here, again, we impose on ourselves—we imagine we have faculties we do not possess. The world clad with verdure, rivers, and beauty, requires exactly the same mental perception and process as the world without a blade of grass or ray of light. For how can we imagine the absence of a thing, or conceive its absence, if we are not cognisant of its presence? Absence implies the withdrawal of a present. Universal colourness, universal silence, uni-

versal impalpability, universal tastelessness, are just as much phenomena, requiring in thought the presence of an ideal percipient, endowed with sight and hearing, taste and touch, as their more positive opposites were phenomena requiring such a percipient. Non-existence itself is a phenomenon requiring a percipient present to apprehend it, just as much as existence is.

It is bringing the entire matter up to this point, which can alone leave Berkeley in clear and full possession and mastery of the field. He leaves himself open to attack, or, at least, misconception and misconstruction, by conveying the idea that there are mountains, suns and stars, trees and rivers in the world, because they are *seen*; hence, it is inferred, if they are not seen, or thought of as seen, they would not exist; the objector forgetting that the existence or non-existence equally imply percipient mind. The basis of the idealistic principle must be made broader, and every objection falls to the ground. We affirm that, in the case of every *phenomenon*,—that is, even in the case of the phenomenon of the absence of all phenomena—a subject-mind must be thought of as united with the phenomenon. No trees and no houses is a phenomenon, just as much as trees and houses are phenomena,—and as such, can no more exist without being seen or thought of as seen, than any other phenomenon can. The phenomenon of object and the phenomenon of no object each implies a subject mind; and to suppose the mind present in one case and absent in

another, implies a contradiction opposed to the entire of true philosophy—it would be chargeable with holding that *some* phenomena are independent and irrespective of a percipient mind, either really or ideally present to them, and that others are not; whereas the great fact is, that *no* phenomenon, not even the phenomenon of the absence of all phenomena, is independent or irrespective of mind. However, it does not follow from this, that if there were no conscious mind, there would be no *matter*, because *no matter* depends just as much upon the real or the ideal presence of a conscious mind.

Bringing the argument to this issue, renders the position taken by Berkeley impregnable. The question put by the adversary is unanswerable, not because incapable of solution, but because incapable of being asked, thought of, entertained, or conceived.

III. The new principle being thus guarded against objections, we are brought to the third great division of “the Principles of Human Knowledge,”—its application. This extends from section 85 to 156; and the vast variety of subject precludes the possibility of entering into its details. A great part is treated of in Sir William Hamilton’s Dissertations, examined by John Stuart Mill, and he in turn examined by Dr M’Cosh. Berkeley repeats his usual enumeration of the sources of human knowledge—*ideas* and *spirits*, each of which he treats in order; *ideas* to section 134, and *spirits* from section 135 to 156.

But just here we are met by difficulties. In asking the question, What are *ideas*, Hamilton appeals continually to *consciousness*, Locke to *idea*, Brown to suggestion, and Mill to association. How far are these expressions to be united and separated? The "*idea*" of Berkeley is certainly different from the "*idea*" of Locke, though they partly seem to agree in applying "*idea*" to *whatever* we are conscious of, whether in sense or imagination, whether in fancies or feelings. The known universe of both is limited to their "*ideas*." Berkeley recognises the marks of reality in one class of Locke's "*ideas*"—those given in sense, and is thus able to dispense with Locke's reasonings on behalf of reality. Out of this recognition Berkeley's system naturally grows. Sir W. Hamilton, who may generally be depended on for stating fairly the opinions of others, has been somewhat misled by his contempt for the later forms of Cosmothetic Idealism; but making allowance for this, his words bring pretty clearly out the exact position of the idealism of Berkeley. He says,—“Natural Realism and Absolute Idealism are the only systems worthy of a Philosopher; for as they alone have any foundation in consciousness, so they alone have any consistency in themselves. . . . Both build upon the same fundamental fact, that the extended object immediately perceived is identical with the extended object actually existing. For the truth of this fact, both can appeal to the common sense of mankind,—and to the common sense of mankind Berkeley did appeal, not less

confidently, and perhaps more logically than Reid. . . . The Scheme of Hypothetical Realism or Cosmothetic Idealism, which supposes that behind the non-existent world perceived, lurks a correspondent, but unknown world existing, is not only repugnant to our natural beliefs, but in manifold contradiction with itself. The scheme of natural realism may be ultimately difficult, for like all other truths, it ends in the inconceivable; but hypothetical realism—in its origin, in its developement, in its result, although the favourite scheme of philosophers, is philosophically absurd.”

Professor Fraser, in his article, “Real World of Berkeley,”—*Macmillan's Magazine*, Vol. vi., 1862, puts the case very clearly. He says “Berkeley sweeps away, as an inconsistent or unintelligible abstraction, the supposed unthinking or archetypal world behind, and finds the material reality in *our very sense ideas themselves*. By interpreting phenomena in the system of our sense-ideas, whose orderly and significant changes reveal, like the hand-writing on the wall, the existence and activity of other minds than ours, we become *en rapport* with those other minds. We are able, as it were, to *look into other conscious experience than our own*—like our own more or less, and yet not ours; but we cannot look into, or even imagine that which is given in sense, when withdrawn from all sense—consciousness. Our sense-ideas, which thus appear and disappear, obviously under the regulation of other minds than our own, as we may reasonably infer from the *manner* of their

appearance and disappearance are broadly distinguished from the mere fancies which are formed and controlled by the minds in which they appear. The ideas of sense are more strong and lively than those of imagination. They are not excited at random, but in a regular train or series, the admirable connection of which attests the wisdom of its author. Our sense-ideas are our material world, and the rules according to which they are excited in us are the laws of nature. The existence of *this* matter cannot be denied; its very *esse* is *percipi*—it is the only material world which common sense demands. A supplementary real world *behind* the things or real ideas which we experience in sense, is a baseless hypothesis—a mere crotchet of the professional manufacturers of abstractions, which unsophisticated human beings would laugh at, if they could only be got to discern its meaning, or rather its want of meaning. Such is the spirit of the immediate realism of Berkeley.”

Endeavouring thus, as far as possible, to gain a clear view of what Berkeley means by “ideas,” we can better enter into the variety of his *application*. He applies his philosophy to restore belief, and to purify and simplify the sciences; to matter, mind, substance, cause; to the philosophical world of ideas; the refutation of scepticism, regarding sensible things and God; the liberation of thought from abstraction, by correcting prevailing and paradoxical conceptions of time, space, motion, happiness, justice, and virtue; the purification and simplification of

natural philosophy, by correcting prevailing and paradoxical conceptions of time, space, and motion ; the purification and simplification of mathematics, in correcting our notions of number and extension, and by the abolition of the contradiction involved in the common doctrine of infinities.

All this is involved under "ideas." From this Berkeley passes on to the second great source of knowledge, and applies the new system of our notions of *minds* or *spirits*, from section 135 to 156,—(1.) Showing how it sustains our faith in the immortality of the soul ; (2.) To explain and vindicate belief in external persons similar to himself ; and (3.) To vindicate belief in the existence of supreme mind.

To take up and fully discuss any one of the subjects included in these two portions of human knowledge, would far exceed the limits of an essay. There are many things in which it is impossible to agree with Berkeley. Sir William Hamilton's review of Berkeley's doctrine, that the eye gives us only colour, has commonly been regarded as a criticism amounting almost to a demonstration. Even Mr Mill acknowledges,—"I cannot make the answer to this argument as thorough and conclusive as I could wish." But while philosophers of first ability have criticised the views of Berkeley, they have put forward views as dangerous as those that may be laid at the door of Berkeley. Hume, in maintaining that mind is a series of feelings aware of itself, and that matter is a possibility

of sensations; Sir William Hamilton, in unfolding his doctrine of the relativity of knowledge; and Professor Ferrier, in the theory that one's self mixes as an integral and essential part with our knowledge of every object, while, endeavouring to answer one class of objections, have laid themselves open to another. And Mr Mill, and I may add, Mr Herbert Spenser, are pursuing to their proper issues the doctrine floating in nearly all our later metaphysics, that we know nothing of the nature of things. It is this conclusion arrived at by different thinkers, of various schools and by different methods, that has turned attention more especially of late on Berkeley's Philosophy. We have to give up the eternity of matter, change being the first step to annihilation. If a solid can be changed by any process to a liquid, I do not know how under other influences it may disappear altogether, and I am led up to One, who, because He never changes, can never be destroyed or cease; and as He never can cease or end, must never have had beginning. He alone is the source and preserver of all. Philosophers have had to give up the *a priori* argument that a spiritual substance, by the essential constitution of its nature, cannot perish. There is nothing in the nature of spirit more than in matter, which necessitates eternity of duration. Therefore, amid the wreck of ancient established opinions and a darkened ignorance, increasing, shrouding every metaphysical and scientific truth,—instead of being landed in a dreary scepticism, Berkeley leads me

upward to a true and living God. I may differ in many details, refuse assent to many statements,—but all these are of minor importance compared with the grand central truth, which is the glory of the Berkeleian Philosophy, and causes it to wield an ever increasing power over mankind. All visible creation is the alphabet, the letters, the language, in which I read daily the actings of an infinitely wise, perfect, and omnipotent mind. There is not a wheel in motion but he turns, not a law but he frames, not a combining or severing but he causes, doing all after the council of his own will; the law of nature being the law of God, the operation of free intelligence. The difference between the changes which are due merely to natural law, and the changes which we attribute immediately to the agency of men, is not a difference between necessity and free will, but between the signs of a perfect, and imperfect mind. The events of human history and biography are less capable of prediction than those of natural science, because they are the product of a less steady and reasonable will. Or, to use the concluding words of Berkeley,—“We ought therefore earnestly to meditate and dwell on these important points, that so we may attain conviction without all scruple, ‘that the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good;’ that he is with us and keepeth us in all places that we go, and ‘giveth us bread to eat and raiment to put on;’ that he is present and conscious to our innermost thoughts, and that we have a most absolute and immediate dependence on him.”



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